

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES.

Bird-Life of the Borders: Records of Wild Sport and Natural History on Moorland and Sea. By ABEL CHAPMAN. Gurney and Jackson. London, 1889.

"Good wine needs no bush," and we have noticed with satisfaction that, although reviewers may play for safety when they are not sure of their subject as regards an indifferent book, they show a wonderfully quick appreciation for one which is thoroughly good. The present volume is a case in point, for the author is at once a true sportsman and naturalist as well as an artist of no mean ability, though no allusion to the numerous spirited illustrations appears on the titlepage. From all sides comes the chorus of praise; experienced wild-fowlers considering that, in the portion of the work relating to the gunning-punt, Mr. Chapman has done for the north of England what Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey did for the sister island with his 'Fowler in Ireland,' while ornithologists have thoroughly appreciated the keen insight displayed in the description of the habits, food, changes of plumage, &c. of the birds which frequent the moorland and the coast. When treating of these, Mr. Chapman introduces from time to time some pertinent and interesting remarks upon his experiences in Spain and Spitsbergen—the southern and the northern extremities of Europe, if, indeed, the latter can be claimed as an appanage by any continent; and his personal observations over so wide an area are entitled to a respectful reception, but he must beware of accepting too readily, or at too high a value, the plausible hypotheses of others, and he must try to avoid the youthful fault of generalizing upon imperfect evidence. In asking such questions as "Where do the Common [Bar-tailed] Godwit, Knot, Sanderling, and Curlew-Sandpiper breed? Whence come they in myriad hosts every August to our shores?" he hardly seems to realize the enormous extent of the known but almost unexplored land which lies within the Arctic Circle. No doubt some large islands are as yet undiscovered, especially to the northward of Bering Sea; but we need not go so far as that for "tundras" sufficient for the reproduction of all the above species. It is true that neither Spitsbergen nor Novaya Zemlya appear to be suited to their requirements; but the little that is known of Franz-Josef Land does not altogether justify its being placed in the same category, for the climatic conditions of that territory are exceptional, open water existing throughout the winter; and Mr. Leigh Smith actually found Brünnich's Guillemot assembled there early in March! As regards the Bar-tailed Godwit, Mr. Chapman takes exception to the name because, he says, "its tail is *not* barred except in the young;" but therein he goes too far, for the adults in breeding-plumage—hardly known in Northumberland—have the true tail-feathers distinctly banded. The name was not, however, conferred by the unobservant pedant or the cabinet naturalist; it was given by practical sportsmen and wildfowlers, who distinguished a bird as "bar-tailed"

when they saw that its rump and the long tail-coverts—which in this species reach far down and cover the true tail-feathers—were barred at all seasons of the year; they never dreamt of limiting the meaning of the word “tail” to the ten stiff-shafted rectrices.

We have tried to find a little fault with a few passages in this excellent book, lest Mr. Chapman should become surfeited with eulogy, which, however deserved, has a tendency to prove unwholesome; and a gentle corrective may be the more beneficial, inasmuch as he is preparing a work on the south of Spain which cannot fail to prove interesting. If he will take a little pains to condense and to chasten his style he may become a very strong writer, for there can be no more doubt of his powers of description than there is of his general accuracy.

Sylvan Folk: Sketches of Bird- and Animal-Life in Britain.

By JOHN WATSON. T. Fisher Unwin.

THIS little book consists of a collection of articles, many of which have, we believe, already appeared in various newspapers; and the style in which they are written is only too characteristic of the slipshod “copy” considered good enough for the reader by editors of the present day. The late Richard Jefferies possessed a certain power of picturesque description which captivated the public; and, as usual, a host of imitators have been for some time clutching at the hem of his garment in the hope of acquiring the entire mantle of his inspiration—but in vain; for an attempt at writing crisply or epigrammatically too often ends in twaddle and even in bathos.

Mr. Watson boasts of having taken all his facts at first hand from nature; speaks of “caring little for the dry bones of science, and having but scant sympathy for that species of natural history which is acquired in closets;” and adds: “We know what science—or, rather, its masters—is doing for birds now-a-days. ‘One kills them, the other writes classifying epitaphs.’” After this declamation we are not surprised at being told that “the swift is the last to come of all the swallows,” in disregard of the fact that the latter are Passeres, while the former have long been placed among Picariæ; all these insect-eaters being spoken of as “hirundines,” by which we presume the author means Hirundinidæ. Our sympathies are with Mr. Watson in his desire to prevent the indiscriminate destruction of birds and beasts of prey; but his remarks upon grouse-disease and the overstocking of moors indicate that he is unaware of the very heavy mortality among grouse in 1815, when their natural enemies were still abundant. To speak of the Little Bustard as now extinct in Britain is absurd, for it never was more than an accidental visitor, and has become much more frequent of late years. Similar ignorance is displayed respecting the Great Auk, which, according to the author, was once plentiful “among certain of its icy haunts;” while the hope held out that “further north, and within the arctic circle, there are still surf-